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Invention: INFORMATION PROCESSING APPARATUS AND INFORMATION PROCESSING METHOD

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SPECIFICATION

DESCRIPTION

INFORMATION PROCESSING APPARATUS AND
INFORMATION PROCESSING METHOD

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Technical Field

The present invention relates to an information processing apparatus and information processing method having a wireless communication function of performing network connection via a wireless relay apparatus.

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Background Art

Recent compact information processing devices such as a notebook-type personal computer and PDA have a function of discovering a peripheral wireless LAN access point in a use environment and performing network connection via the access point. A function of visually monitoring a network is also implemented.

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When the user carries and uses such a portable personal computer, PDA, or the like, the wireless LAN must be set with respect to a peripheral wireless device upon a change in communication environment each time the personal computer, PDA, or the like is moved. A long time and much labor are required when the wireless LAN setting is switched by user operation.

For example, a current automatic switching function for the wireless LAN setting as disclosed in Jpn. Pat. Appln. KOKAI Publication No. 2003-244167 provides only a fixed switching function for a given device. In this

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situation, demands have arisen for a user-friendly communication function considering the user's application purpose, environment, and the like.

Disclosure of Invention

5 The present invention has been made in consideration of the above situation, and has as its object to provide an information processing apparatus, information processing method, and program capable of reflecting the user's application purpose, environment,
10 and the like with respect to a peripheral wireless device and very conveniently setting a communication environment.

 According to a first aspect of the present invention, an information processing apparatus having
15 a communication apparatus which performs network connection via a wireless relay apparatus comprises an information acquisition unit which acquires pieces of information of discovered wireless relay apparatuses by discovering the wireless relay apparatuses communicable
20 with the communication apparatus, and a profile setting unit which sets communication profiles for the wireless relay apparatuses discovered by the information acquisition unit. The information processing apparatus further comprises a priority condition setting unit
25 which sets a priority condition for deciding priorities of the communication profiles to be used by the communication apparatus, and a profile decision unit

which decides a communication profile to be used by the communication apparatus on the basis of the pieces of information of the wireless relay apparatuses that are acquired by the information acquisition unit, the
5 communication profiles set by the profile setting unit, and the priority condition set by the priority condition setting unit.

According to a second aspect of the present invention, a method of connecting a network via
10 a wireless relay apparatus by using a communication apparatus comprises discovering wireless relay apparatuses communicable with the communication apparatus to acquire pieces of information of the discovered wireless relay apparatuses, setting
15 communication profiles for the discovered wireless relay apparatuses, and setting a priority condition for deciding priorities of the communication profiles to be used by the communication apparatus. The method further comprises deciding a communication profile to
20 be used by the communication apparatus on the basis of the pieces of acquired information of the wireless relay apparatuses, the set communication profiles, and the set priority condition.

According to a third aspect of the present invention, a program causes a computer which controls
25 a communication apparatus for performing network connection via a wireless relay apparatus, to perform

the following processes. More specifically, the program causes the computer to implement discovering wireless relay apparatuses communicable with the communication apparatus, acquiring pieces of
5 information of the discovered wireless relay apparatuses, holding communication profiles set for the wireless relay apparatuses which communicate with the communication apparatus, holding a priority condition for deciding priorities of the communication
10 profiles to be used by the communication apparatus, and deciding a communication profile to be used by the communication apparatus on the basis of the pieces of acquired information of the wireless relay apparatuses, the communication profiles, and the priority condition.

15 According to the present invention, a user-friendly communication environment in which the user's application purpose, environment, and the like are reflected can be set for a peripheral wireless device.

Additional objects and advantages of the invention
20 will be set forth in the description which follows, and in part will be obvious from the description, or may be learned by practice of the invention. The objects and advantages of the invention may be realized and obtained by means of the instrumentalities and
25 combinations particularly pointed out hereinafter.

Brief Description of Drawings

The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated

in and constitute a part of the specification,
illustrate presently preferred embodiments of the
invention, and together with the general description
given above and the detailed description of the
5 preferred embodiments given below, serve to explain the
principles of the invention.

FIG. 1 is a conceptual view for explaining the
outline of the operation of an information processing
apparatus according to an embodiment of the present
10 invention;

FIG. 2 is a view showing a system configuration
for explaining the outline of the function of the
information processing apparatus according to the
embodiment of the present invention;

15 FIG. 3 is a block diagram showing the hardware
configuration of the information processing apparatus
according to the embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a view showing an example of the
structure of a wireless LAN setting list;

20 FIG. 5 is a view showing an example of the
structure of an access point list;

FIG. 6 is a flowchart showing an example of
a communication profile selection process sequence
applied to the information processing apparatus
25 according to the embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 7 is a flowchart showing another example of
the communication profile selection process sequence

applied to the information processing apparatus according to the embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 8 is a schematic view showing an example of an initial setting window applied to the information processing apparatus according to the embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 9 is a schematic view showing an example of a communication profile setting window applied to the information processing apparatus according to the embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. 10 is a schematic view showing an example of an automatic connection setting window applied to the information processing apparatus according to the embodiment of the present invention.

Best Mode for Carrying Out the Invention

A preferred embodiment of the present invention will be described below with reference to the several views of the accompanying drawing.

The outline of the operation according to the present invention will be explained with reference to FIG. 1.

FIG. 1 illustrates the state of a wireless LAN for explaining the outline of the operation according to the present invention. FIG. 1 shows a communication environment in which a plurality of wireless relay apparatuses (access points A, B, C, and D) 20(A), 20(B), 20(C), and 20(D) communicable with a personal

computer (PC) 30 exist around the personal computer 30. The user can set one of the network name, communication speed, security level, communication channel, and radio field strength as a wireless LAN connection condition
5 in the personal computer 30.

The personal computer 30 has a wireless LAN card. The personal computer 30 receives beacons from the peripheral access points A, B, C, and D 20(A), 20(B), 20(C), and 20(D), and acquires their network names, the
10 communication speeds of the communication devices, the security levels, the communication channels, and the radio field strengths.

The access point A 20(A) has "SSID: A, radio field strength: 14 dB, communication standard: 802.11b,
15 channel: 6, encryption: WEP". The access point B 20(B) has "SSID: B, radio field strength: 5 dB, communication standard: 802.11b, channel: 6, encryption: TKIP". The access point C 20(C) has "SSID: C, radio field strength: 57 dB, communication standard: 802.11g,
20 channel: 6, security: none". The access point D 20(D) has "SSID: D, radio field strength: 16 dB, communication standard: 802.11b, channel: 2, encryption: AES". The SSID (extended service set identity) is identification information (ID) for
25 grouping access points or the like. WEP is an abbreviation for "Wired Equivalently Privacy", TKIP is an abbreviation for "Temporary Key Integrity Protocol",

and AES is an abbreviation for "Advanced Encryption Standard".

In this communication environment, when "radio field strength" is set as an automatic switching condition for the wireless LAN setting in the personal computer 30, the wireless LAN is connected to an access point in a stronger radio field situation. In this case, the wireless LAN is automatically connected to the access point C 20(C) having the strongest radio field strength among the four access points A, B, C, and D 20(A), 20(B), 20(C), and 20(D).

When "security level" is set as an automatic switching condition for the wireless LAN setting, the wireless LAN is connected to an access point in a higher security situation. In this case, the wireless LAN is automatically connected to the access point D 20(D) which applies the highest-security-level AES among the four access points A, B, C, and D 20(A), 20(B), 20(C), and 20(D).

When "communication channel" is set as an automatic switching condition for the wireless LAN setting, the wireless LAN is connected to an access point using empty channels (smallest number of channels used). In the example shown in FIG. 1, the wireless LAN is automatically connected to the access point D 20(D) using the smallest number of channels among the four access points A, B, C, and D 20(A), 20(B), 20(C),

and 20(D).

When "communication speed" is set as an automatic switching condition for the wireless LAN setting, the wireless LAN is connected to an access point having the highest communication speed. In the example shown in FIG. 1, the wireless LAN is automatically connected to the access point C 20(C) serving as an access point of the communication standard 802.11g which provides a communication speed higher than that of the communication standard 802.11b, among the four access points A, B, C, and D 20(A), 20(B), 20(C), and 20(D).

In this manner, according to the embodiment of the present invention, the wireless LAN setting is automatically switched in accordance with various communication conditions such as the communication speed of the communication device, the security level, the communication channel, and the radio field strength in a system having a wireless LAN card capable of setting a plurality of wireless LANs (setting communication profiles). The communication environment can always be automatically switched to the best one under a communication condition desired by the user without performing wireless LAN setting operation by the user upon a change in communication environment with respect to the access point 20.

The embodiment of the present invention which implements the above communication function will be

described below.

FIG. 2 shows an example of a system configuration for explaining the outline of the function of an information processing apparatus according to the embodiment of the present invention.

As shown in FIG. 2, a wireless LAN access area (W-LAN) 17 implements a communication network by LANs 15(1) and 15(2) which target specific areas, an IP network 10, and the like. Although not shown, each of the wireless LAN access area (W-LAN) 17 and the LANs 15(1) and 15(2) which target specific areas comprises a printer, network, file server, and various servers. The wireless LAN access area (W-LAN) 17 includes wireless LAN access points 20 for predetermined areas.

A client terminal is implemented by, e.g., a portable personal computer 30. The personal computer 30 has a wireless LAN device such as a wireless LAN card, and a communication environment control program. The personal computer 30 has a communication function of connecting the personal computer 30 via the wireless LAN to the access point 20 within the wireless LAN access area 17 and performing network connection between the personal computer 30 and an arbitrary device via various servers and the IP network 10.

The personal computer 30 incorporates a communication environment control program (140 in FIG. 3). The communication environment control program

140 has a display function and processing function (to be described later). The display function displays on a display 32 a setting window (initial setting window) 200 used to set a communication profile for enabling
5 automatic wireless LAN setting (automatic access point switching), a priority condition for determining the priority of the wireless LAN, and the like. The processing function receives beacons from the peripheral access points 20, and discovers the access
10 points 20. The processing function acquires and holds pieces of information such as the network names of the discovered access points 20, the communication speeds of the communication devices, the security levels, the communication channels, and the radio field strengths.
15 A communication profile used in the wireless LAN is selected on the basis of the pieces of held information, and communication profiles (see FIG. 4) and wireless LAN priority conditions (see FIG. 10) which are set for a plurality of access points 20 by
20 using the initial setting window 200 and held in a database 31. The communication environment can be automatically switched to the best one under a communication condition desired by the user. Functions realized by the communication environment
25 control program will be described later with reference to FIGS. 4 to 10. The personal computer 30 can be connected to another wireless device (WL-DV) 40 via

a wireless ad hoc network (Ad hoc).

The system configuration of the personal computer 30 will be explained with reference to FIG. 3.

As shown in FIG. 3, the personal computer 30
5 comprises a CPU 101, host bridge 102, main memory 103,
display controller 104, system controller 105, hard
disk drive (HDD) 106, wired LAN device 107, wireless
LAN device 108, BIOS-ROM 110, and embedded
controller/keyboard controller IC (EC/KBC) 111.

10 The CPU 101 is a processor adopted to control
the operation of the personal computer 30. The CPU 101
executes an operating system (OS) 129 and various
application/utility programs which are loaded from the
hard disk drive (HDD) 106 to the main memory 103 via
15 the system controller 105 and host bridge 102. The CPU
101 also executes a BIOS (Basic Input Output System)
which are stored in the BIOS-ROM 110.

The CPU 101 executes a communication control
program 130 stored in the main memory 103, in
20 accordance with a predetermined setting condition
(e.g., a predetermined time interval). The CPU 101
executes a predetermined application process associated
with a communication service including monitoring and
discovery of the peripheral access points 20, and
25 acquisition of information (the network names of
the access points, the communication speeds of
the communication devices, the security levels,

the communication channels, and the radio field strengths) of the discovered access points 20 (from which beacons are received).

5 The CPU 101 executes the communication environment control program 140 stored in the main memory 103, in accordance with, e.g., an icon selected by user from the start menu or task tray. The CPU 101 enables, on the initial setting window 200, communication profile setting targeting a plurality of communication
10 profiles, wireless LAN priority condition setting, automatic communication profile switching setting, and the like. A concrete example of the structure of the initial setting window 200 will be described later with reference to FIG. 8.

15 The CPU 101 acquires pieces of information such as the network names of the discovered access points 20, the communication speeds of the communication devices, the security levels, the communication channels, and the radio field strengths in the process of the
20 communication environment control program 140 based on the settings using the initial setting window 200. The CPU 101 holds a list of pieces of information as an access point list (AP list) 401 in the main memory 103. The CPU 101 selects a communication
25 profile used in the wireless LAN on the basis of these pieces of information, and communication profiles and wireless LAN priority conditions which are set for

a plurality of access points 20 by using the setting window 200 and held in the database 31. This realizes the processing function capable of automatically switching the communication environment to the best one under a communication condition desired by the user. FIG. 4 shows a concrete example of the structure of a communication profile list (wireless LAN setting list) 301 set for a plurality of communication profiles. FIG. 5 shows a concrete example of the AP list 401. FIG. 6 shows an example of a communication profile selection process sequence using these lists. FIG. 7 shows another example of the communication profile selection process sequence. FIG. 10 shows a concrete example of the structure of the wireless LAN priority condition setting window.

The host bridge 102 is a bridge device which connects the CPU 101 and system controller 105. The host bridge 102 incorporates a memory controller (not shown) which controls access to the main memory 103.

The display controller 104 controls the display (DISP) 32 which adopts, e.g., an LCD and is used as the display monitor of the personal computer 30. In the embodiment, the display (DISP) 32 displays, under the control of the communication environment control program 140, the initial setting window 200 for allowing automatic switching of the wireless LAN

(access point 20), as shown in FIG. 8, a communication profile setting window 210 as shown in FIG. 9, and a condition setting window 220 for setting a condition for selecting a wireless LAN (communication profile), as shown in FIG. 10.

The system controller 105 controls devices on a PCI bus 126 and devices on an ISA bus 128. The system controller 105 incorporates an IDE controller (not shown) for controlling the hard disk drive (HDD) 106.

The communication control program 130 is installed in advance as one of utility programs in the hard disk drive 106. In the above-described monitoring process for the peripheral access points 20, the communication control program 130 receives beacons transmitted from the access points 20, and acquires pieces of access point information for the discovered access points (from which beacons are received). A list of pieces of information of the access points 20 that are acquired by reception of beacons is held as the AP list 401 in the database (DB) 31 of the hard disk drive 106. The AP list 401 held in the database 31 is updated at a predetermined time interval or upon occurrence of a predetermined event such as a change in communication environment or link-down at the access point. Every time the AP list 401 is updated, it is written in the main memory 103.

The communication environment control program 140

is installed in advance as one of utility programs in the hard disk drive 106. As described above, the communication environment control program 140 is executed by, e.g., selecting an icon from the start menu or task tray by the user. The communication environment control program 140 provides the user with the initial setting window 200 for allowing automatic switching of the wireless LAN (access point 20), as shown in FIG. 8. Together with the AP list 401, the database 31 holds the wireless LAN setting list 301 which is set using the initial setting window 200 and serves as a list of the communication profiles of the access points 20. Further, the database 31 further holds a connection condition 402 which is set using the condition setting window 220 (FIG. 10) displayable from the initial setting window 200 and is used to select a wireless LAN (communication profile) to be automatically connected. The wireless LAN setting list 301, AP list 401, and connection condition 402 which are held in the database 31 are loaded to the main memory 103, and referred to in the subsequent communication profile selection process executed by the communication environment control program 140.

The wired LAN device 107 is a device for connecting the personal computer 30 to a wired network. Although not shown, the wired LAN device 107 communicates with the wired network via a wired LAN

cable connected to a LAN connector.

The wireless LAN device 108 is a wireless network device such as a wireless LAN card for connecting the personal computer 30 to a wireless network.

5 The wireless LAN device 108 is formed from a baseband unit and RF unit. The RF unit transmits/receives radio signals via an antenna (ANT) 109. The wireless LAN device 108 is so constructed as to execute wireless communication in accordance with the standard such as
10 IEEE 802.11a, IEEE 802.11b, or IEEE 802.11g. Upon reception of a beacon (RB) transmitted from the access point 20, the wireless LAN device 108 notifies the CPU 101 of a message to this effect, and executes acquisition of access point information and
15 communication via the access point under the control of the CPU 101.

The embedded controller/keyboard controller IC (EC/KBC) 111 is a single-chip microcomputer in which an embedded controller for managing power and
20 a keyboard controller for controlling a keyboard 112 are integrated. The embedded controller/keyboard controller IC (EC/KBC) 111 has a function of ON/OFF-controlling power of the personal computer 30 in accordance with the operation of the power button by
25 the user.

FIG. 4 shows an example of the wireless LAN setting list 301 serving as a list of communication

profiles set for a plurality of access points 20 on the communication profile setting window 210 (FIG. 9) which is opened from the initial setting window 200. An SSID for each available access point, an infrastructure mode (infrastructure/ad hoc), an authentication mode (OPEN/SHARED/WPA/WPA-PSK), security information (OPEN/SHARED = Disabled/WEP/AES, WPA/WPA-PSK = TKIP/AES), and the like are set in the wireless LAN setting list 301. Also, a network key, a key index, whether to automatically distribute a key, and whether to validate/invalidate IEEE 802.1X authentication are set as other pieces of information. FIG. 9 shows a concrete example of the structure of the communication profile setting window 210 used for this setting. The SSID is an identifier (ID) for grouping access points, and the ad hoc (Ad hoc) is a network between computers.

More specifically, the setting window 210 shown in FIG. 9 comprises a network name input box 211, wireless network key setting box 212, IEEE setting box 213, Ad hoc check button 214, Ad hoc channel setting button 215, OK button 216, and cancel button 217. The wireless network key setting box 212 comprises a network authentication setting box 212a, data encryption setting box 212b, network key input box 212c, network key confirmation input box 212d, key index setting box 212e, and automatic key distribution

setting button 212f. The IEEE setting box 213 comprises an IEEE authentication validation setting button 213a, EPA type setting box 213b, and authentication configuration setting box 213c.

5 The wireless LAN setting list 301 as shown in FIG. 4 is created by setting necessary input items by using the setting window 210 having this structure.

A list of wireless LANs (access points 20) complying with the contents of the wireless LAN setting
10 list 301 is displayed in a wireless LAN display column 205 within a "preferential network" setting area 203 on the initial setting window 200 shown in FIG. 8.

FIG. 5 shows an example of the AP list 401 serving as a list of pieces of information of peripheral
15 access points that are acquired by the monitoring process of the communication control program 130. The SSIDs/BSSIDs, infrastructure modes, key states, radio field strengths, channels, and communication methods of discovered access points 20 are set in the
20 AP list 401. The BSSID (basic service set identify) is an ID for authenticating a communication terminal or the like in the MAC layer. The BSSID can be recognized by receiving a beacon (RB) transmitted from the access point 20, similar to the SSID.

25 A list of wireless LANs (access points) complying with the contents of the AP list 401 shown in FIG. 5 is displayed in a wireless LAN display column 204 within

an "available network" setting area 202 on the initial setting window 200 shown in FIG. 8.

FIG. 6 is a flowchart showing an example of the communication profile selection process sequence executed by the communication environment control program 140. In the communication profile selection process shown in FIG. 6, the communication profile selection process is executed upon a change in communication environment with respect to the access point 20.

FIG. 7 is a flowchart showing another example of the communication profile selection process sequence executed by the communication environment control program 140. In the communication profile selection process shown in FIG. 7, the communication profile selection process is executed upon occurrence of link-down during communication.

FIG. 8 shows an example of the structure of the initial setting window 200 for allowing automatically switching the wireless LAN (access point). The initial setting window 200 comprises a "wireless LAN device" selection area 201, the "available network" setting area 202, the "preferential network" setting area 203, an OK button 206 for validating input contents, and a cancel button 207 for canceling input contents.

The "wireless LAN device" selection area 201 allows selecting one of mounted wireless LAN devices

when a plurality of wireless LAN devices (wireless LAN cards) are mounted.

The wireless LAN display column 204 in the "available network" setting area 202 selectively
5 displays a list of wireless LANs (access points 20) complying with the contents of the AP list 401 shown in FIG. 5. A wireless LAN (access point 20) is selected in the wireless LAN display column 204, a "configuration" button 204a in the "available
10 network" setting area 202 is clicked, and then the communication profile setting window 210 shown in FIG. 9 is opened. By inputting necessary information using this window, the communication profile of the wireless LAN (access point 20) selected in the wireless
15 LAN display column 204 can be created. By clicking an "update" button 204b in the "available network" setting area 202, the contents of the AP list 401 displayed in the wireless LAN display column 204 can be updated (the AP list 401 can be updated by
20 rediscovering the access point 20).

The wireless LAN display column 205 in the "preferential network" setting area 203 selectively
displays a list of wireless LANs (access points 20) complying with the contents of the wireless LAN setting
25 list 301 shown in FIG. 4. Whether to automatically switch wireless LAN connection can be set by an "automatically connect the computer to an available

network in the order of the following list" check box 205a in the "preferential network" setting area 203. By checking the check box 205a, wireless LAN connection is automatically switched in accordance with the order (priorities) of wireless LANs (access points) displayed in the wireless LAN display column 205. The type (infrastructure mode) of network to be connected by the wireless LAN can be selected by selecting an "access point & Ad hoc" radio button 205b1 of a selection radio button 205b in the "preferential network" setting area 203. The priority in automatic switching of the wireless LAN setting can be changed with a "move up" button 205c and "move down" button 205d in the "preferential network" setting area 203. The communication profile setting window 210 shown in FIG. 9 can be opened to create a communication profile by clicking an "add" button 205e in the "preferential network" setting area 203. A wireless LAN selected from the wireless LAN list displayed in the wireless LAN display column 205 can be deleted by clicking a "delete" button 205f in the "preferential network" setting area 203. The communication profile setting window 210 shown in FIG. 9 can be opened, and a saved communication profile can be referred to and changed by clicking a "properties" button 205g in the "preferential network" setting area 203. A wireless LAN (access point 20) which is selected from the

wireless LAN list displayed in the wireless LAN display column 205 and complies with the communication profile can be manually connected by clicking a "connect" button 205h in the "preferential network" setting area 203. By checking an "automatically connect the computer to a non-preferential network" check box 205i in the "preferential network" setting area 203, an unkeyed peripheral access point 20 can be automatically connected regardless of the communication profile set in the wireless LAN setting list 301.

The condition setting window 220 (FIG. 10) for setting a condition for selecting a wireless LAN (communication profile), i.e., automatically connecting the personal computer 30 to the access point 20 is opened by clicking an "automatic connection setting" button 205j in the "preferential network" setting area 203. Automatic connection can be set on the condition setting window 220.

FIG. 9 shows an example of the structure of the communication profile setting window 210 opened on the initial setting window 200. Input items on the communication profile setting window 210 can be easily understood from the contents of the wireless LAN setting list 301 shown in FIG. 4 and existing communication profiles, and a description thereof will be omitted.

FIG. 10 shows an example of the structure of the

condition setting window (automatic connection setting window) 220 which is opened by clicking the "automatic connection setting" button 205j in the "preferential network" setting area 203 shown in FIG. 8 and is used to set a condition for selecting a communication profile, i.e., automatically connecting the personal computer 30 to the access point 20. The condition setting window 220 provides a left list box 221 and right list box 222. Available conditions in automatic switching of the wireless LAN (communication profile) are prepared in the left list box 221. Of various conditions prepared in the left list box 221, conditions used for automatic switching of the wireless LAN (communication profile) are set in the order of priority in the right list box 222. The radio field strength, security level, communication speed, channel, and the wireless LAN list displayed in the wireless LAN display column 205 are prepared in the left list box 221 as conditions for selecting a communication profile, i.e., automatically connecting the personal computer 30 to an access point. A condition for use is selected in the left list box 221, a ">" button 221a is clicked, and then the condition selected in the left list box 221 is moved (set) to the right list box 222. Also, a condition is selected in the right list box 222, and a "<" button 221b is clicked, and the condition selected in the right list box 222 is

returned to the left list box 221, thereby canceling the setting. By clicking a "move up" button 222a, a condition can be selected in the right list box 222 to raise the priority. By clicking a "move down" button 222b, a condition can be selected in the right list box 222 to lower the priority.

The condition setting window 220 comprises an OK button 223a for reflecting contents set in the right list box 222, a cancel button 223b for canceling set contents, and an apply button 223c for validating set contents.

By using the condition setting window 220, a communication profile can be selected, in other words, one or a plurality of conditions for automatically connecting the personal computer 30 to the access point 20 can be set. At this time, setting conditions are set in the order of priority at a plurality of condition settings.

Various pieces of information for automatic wireless LAN switching that are set using the initial setting window 200, communication profile setting window 210, and condition setting window 220 shown in FIGS. 8, 9, and 10 are reflected in automatic communication profile selection, i.e., an automatic connection process to the access point 20 that is executed by the communication environment control program 140.

An example of the automatic communication profile selection process will be explained with reference to the flowchart shown in FIG. 6.

The CPU 101 executes at, e.g., a predetermined
5 time interval the communication control program 130 stored in the main memory 103, and monitors and discovers the peripheral access points 20(A), 20(B), 20(C), 20(D),.... The CPU 101 executes a process of acquiring pieces of information (the network names of
10 the access points, the communication speeds of the communication devices, the security levels, the communication channels, and the radio field strengths) of the discovered access points 20 (from which beacons are received). The CPU 101 executes the communication
15 environment control program 140 stored in the main memory 103, in accordance with an instruction input for automatic wireless LAN connection by, e.g., selection of an icon by the user from the start menu or task tray. The CPU 101 executes the automatic
20 communication profile selection process shown in FIG. 6 after a setting process based on the initial setting window 200.

In the process shown in FIG. 6, the communication control program 130 monitors the access points 20(A),
25 20(B), 20(C), 20(D),... which exist around the computer 30 and can communicate with the wireless LAN device 108. If a communicable access point is

discovered, pieces of predetermined access point information such as the network name of the access point 20, the communication speed of the communication device, the security level, the communication channel, and the radio field strength are acquired and transferred to the communication environment control program 140 (step S11). The communication environment control program 140 updates the contents of the AP list 401 on the basis of the pieces of information of the discovered access point 20 (step S12). The contents of the updated AP list 401, pieces of information set in the wireless LAN setting list 301, and the connection condition 402 for selecting a communication profile are collated with each other (step S13). Whether a communication profile in the best communication environment which meets the connection condition much more than the current communication environment targeting the access point exists is determined (step S14). If no communication profile in the best communication environment which meets the connection condition much better than the current communication environment exists, the process ends without executing the automatic access point switching process by switching of the communication profile (NO in step S14). If a communication profile in the best communication environment which meets the connection condition exists (YES in step S14), the communication

profile is selected from the wireless LAN setting list 301, and the communication profile for use is switched to the selected one to automatically switch the access point 20 (step S15).

5 Another example of the automatic communication profile selection process will be explained with reference to the flowchart shown in FIG. 7.

 In the process shown in FIG. 7, the automatic communication profile selection process by the
10 communication environment control program 140 is not executed until the communication control program 130 detects a link-down state (step S21 and NO in step S22). If the communication control program 130 detects link-down, the communication environment
15 control program 140 receives a notification to this effect, and updates the contents of the AP list 401 on the basis of information of the discovered access point 20 (step S23). The contents of the updated AP list 401, pieces of information set in the wireless LAN
20 setting list 301, and the connection condition 402 for selecting a communication profile are collated with each other (step S24). A communication profile in the current best communication environment which targets the access point 20 and meets the connection condition
25 is selected. The personal computer 30 is automatically connected to the access point 20 by using the selected communication profile (step S25).

As has been described above, the present invention can implement a user-friendly information processing apparatus and information processing method capable of reflecting the user's application purpose, environment, and the like with respect to a peripheral wireless device and automatically switching setting to an access point 20 in a preferable communication environment.

Additional advantages and modifications will readily occur to those skilled in the art. Therefore, the invention in its broader aspects is not limited to the specific details and representative embodiments shown and described herein. Accordingly, various modifications may be made without departing from the spirit or scope of the general inventive concept as defined by the appended claims and their equivalents.

C L A I M S

1. An information processing apparatus having a communication apparatus which performs network connection via a wireless relay apparatus, comprising:

5 an information acquisition unit which acquires information of discovered wireless relay apparatuses by discovering the wireless relay apparatuses communicable with the communication apparatus;

10 a profile setting unit which sets communication profiles for the wireless relay apparatuses discovered by the information acquisition unit;

15 a priority condition setting unit which sets a priority condition for determining priorities of the communication profiles to be used by the communication apparatus; and

20 a profile determination unit which determines a communication profile to be used by the communication apparatus on the basis of the information of the wireless relay apparatuses that are acquired by the information acquisition unit, the communication profiles set by the profile setting unit, and the priority condition set by the priority condition setting unit.

25 2. An apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the information acquisition unit discovers the communicable wireless relay apparatuses by receiving beacons from wireless relay apparatuses present around

the information processing apparatus, and acquires at least one of a network name, a communication speed, a security level, a communication channel, and a radio field strength of each wireless relay apparatus as the
5 information of each wireless relay apparatus.

3. An apparatus according to claim 2, further comprising a storage device which stores information acquired by the information acquisition unit.

4. An apparatus according to claim 2, in which
10 the priority condition setting unit sets the priority condition on the basis of at least one of the communication speed, the security level, the communication channel, and the radio field strength, and which further comprises an order determination unit
15 which determines priorities for the communication profiles set by the profile setting unit on the basis of the priority condition set by the priority condition setting unit.

5. An apparatus according to claim 4, wherein the
20 profile determination unit determines the communication profile to be used by the communication apparatus in accordance with the priorities determined by the order determination unit.

6. An apparatus according to claim 4, further
25 comprising:

a connection determination unit which determines whether to automatically connect the communication

apparatus to the wireless relay apparatus in which the communication profile determined by the profile determination unit is set; and

5 a connection processing unit which, when the connection determination unit determines to automatically connect the communication apparatus to the wireless relay apparatus, performs a connection process between the communication apparatus and the wireless relay apparatus in which the communication
10 profile is set, by using the communication profile determined by the profile determination unit.

7. An apparatus according to claim 6, further comprising:

15 a change recognition unit which recognizes a change in communication environment between the wireless relay apparatus and the communication apparatus on the basis of a communication content between the wireless relay apparatus and the communication apparatus which have undergone the
20 connection process by the connection processing unit; and

a profile change unit which changes a currently set communication profile to another communication profile in accordance with a content when the change
25 recognition unit recognizes the change in the communication environment.

8. An apparatus according to claim 6, further

comprising a profile change unit which changes a currently set communication profile to another communication profile when a fault occurs in the communication apparatus.

5 9. A method of connecting a network via a wireless relay apparatus by using a communication apparatus, comprising:

 discovering wireless relay apparatuses communicable with the communication apparatus to
10 acquire information of the discovered wireless relay apparatuses;

 setting communication profiles for the discovered wireless relay apparatuses;

 setting a priority condition for determining
15 priorities of the communication profiles to be used by the communication apparatus; and

 determining a communication profile to be used by the communication apparatus on the basis of the
acquired information of the wireless relay apparatuses,
20 the set communication profiles, and the set priority condition.

 10. A method according to claim 9, wherein in acquiring the information, the communicable wireless relay apparatuses are discovered by receiving beacons
25 from the wireless relay apparatuses, and at least one of a network name, a communication speed, a security level, a communication channel, and a radio field

strength of each wireless relay apparatus is acquired as the information of each wireless relay apparatus.

11. A method according to claim 10, further comprising storing the acquired information in
5 a storage device.

12. A method according to claim 10, in which in setting the priority condition, the priority condition is set on the basis of at least one of the communication speed, the security level, the
10 communication channel, and the radio field strength, and which further comprises determining priorities for the set communication profiles on the basis of the set priority condition.

13. A method according to claim 12, wherein in
15 determining the communication profile, the communication profile to be used by the communication apparatus is determined in accordance with the determined priorities.

14. A method according to claim 12, further
20 comprising:

determining whether to automatically connect the communication apparatus to the wireless relay apparatus in which the determined communication profile is set; and

25 when the communication apparatus is determined to be automatically connected to the wireless relay apparatus, performing a connection process between

the communication apparatus and the wireless relay apparatus in which the communication profile is set, by using the determined communication profile.

15. A method according to claim 14, further comprising:

recognizing a change in communication environment between the wireless relay apparatus and the communication apparatus on the basis of a communication content between the wireless relay apparatus and the communication apparatus which have undergone the connection process; and

changing a currently set communication profile to another communication profile in accordance with a content when the change in the communication environment is recognized.

16. A method according to claim 14, further comprising changing a currently set communication profile to another communication profile when a fault occurs in the communication apparatus.

A B S T R A C T

When a personal computer which implements
an information processing apparatus according to this
invention discovers communicable access points, the
5 personal computer acquires pieces of information of
the discovered access points. These pieces of
information include, for example, the network name,
communication speed, security level, communication
channel, and radio field strength. A communication
10 profile to be used by the personal computer is
determined on the basis of these pieces of information,
communication profiles set for the access points, and
the priority of a communication profile to be used by
the personal computer. A connection process between
15 the personal computer and a wireless relay apparatus is
automatically performed using the determined
communication profile.

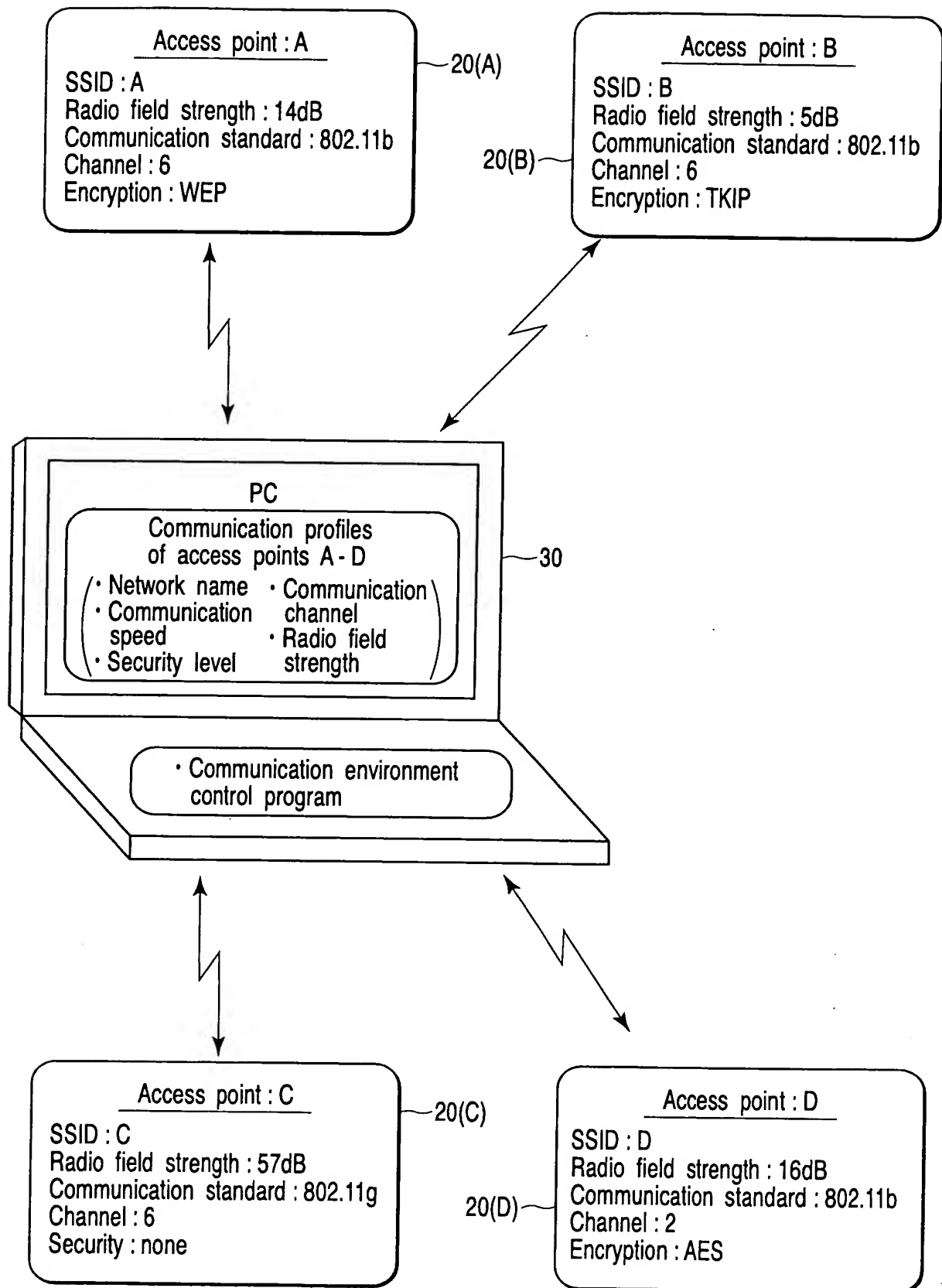


FIG. 1

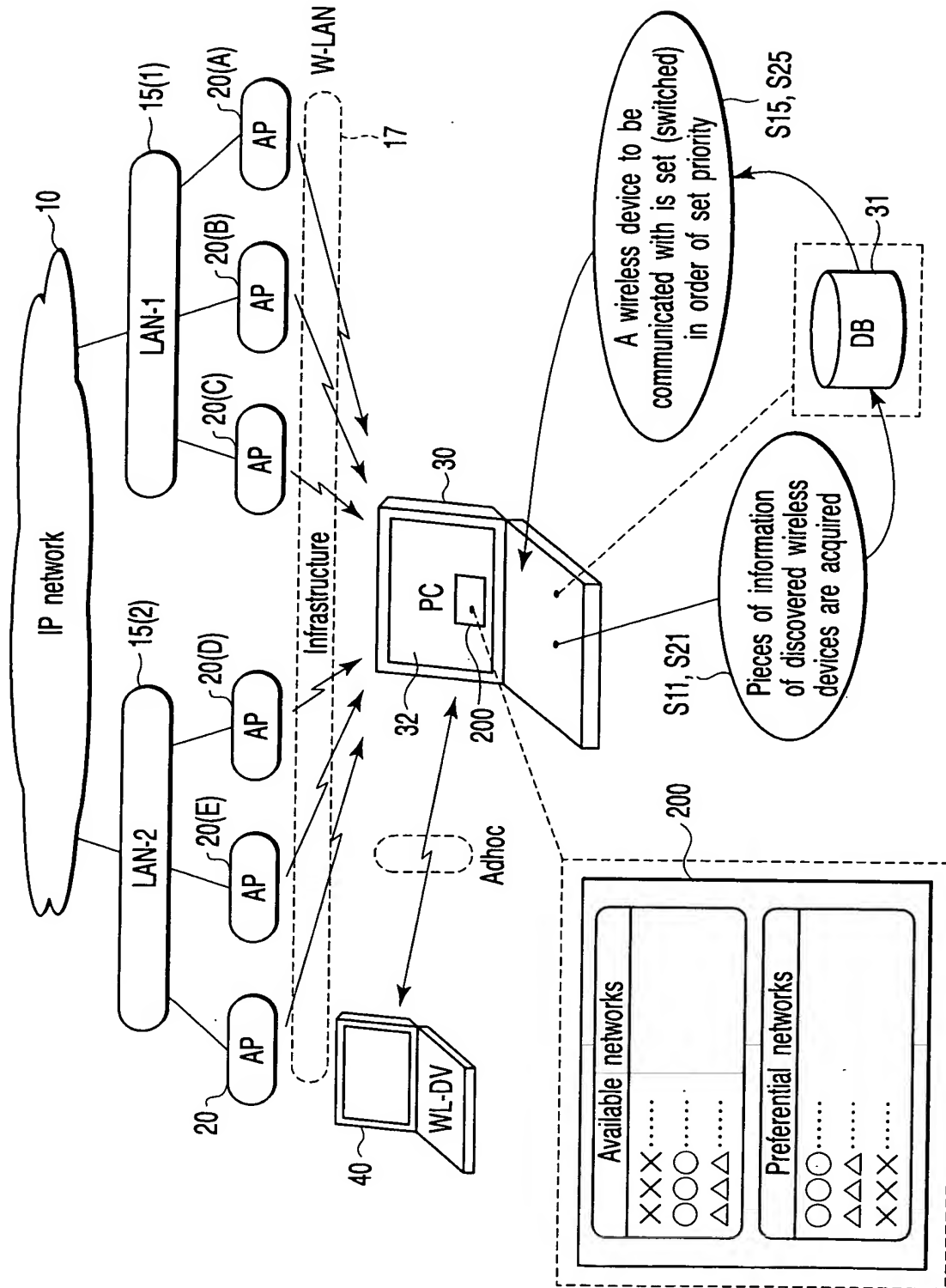


FIG. 2

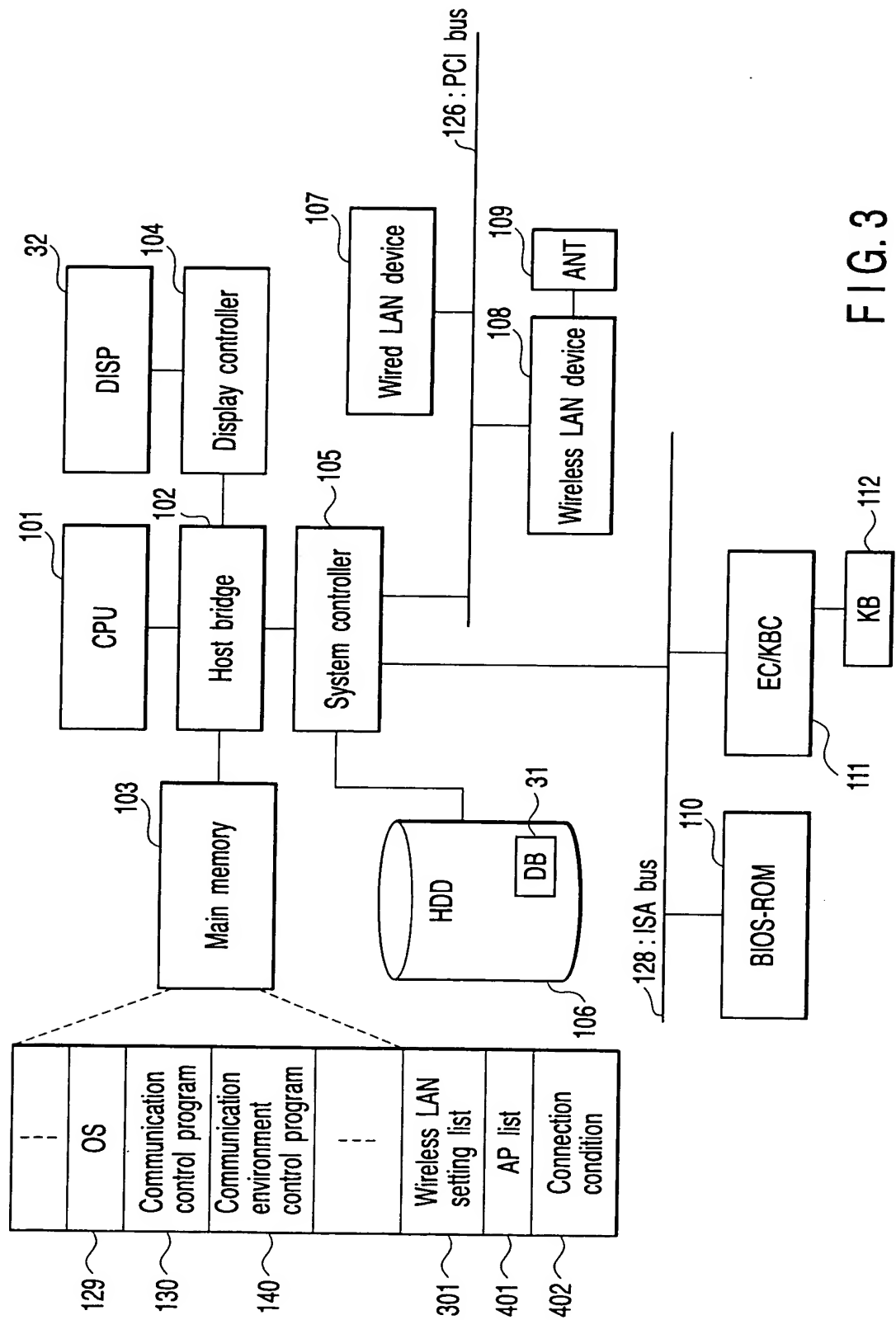


FIG. 3

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Wireless LAN setting list (communication profile)

SSID	Infrastructure mode	Authentication mode	Security setting	Other settings
SSID1	Infrastructure	OPEN	WEP	.
SSID2	Infrastructure	WPA	TKIP	.
SSID3	Ad hoc	WPA	AES	.
⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮

FIG. 4

401

AP list (AP information acquired by beacon reception)

(SSID/BSSID)	Infrastructure mode	Key state	Radio field strength	Channel	Communication method
SSID1	Infrastructure	ON	18dB	7	802.11g
SSID2	Infrastructure	ON	64dB	42	802.11a
SSID3	Ad hoc	OFF	55dB	11	802.11g
⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮

FIG. 5

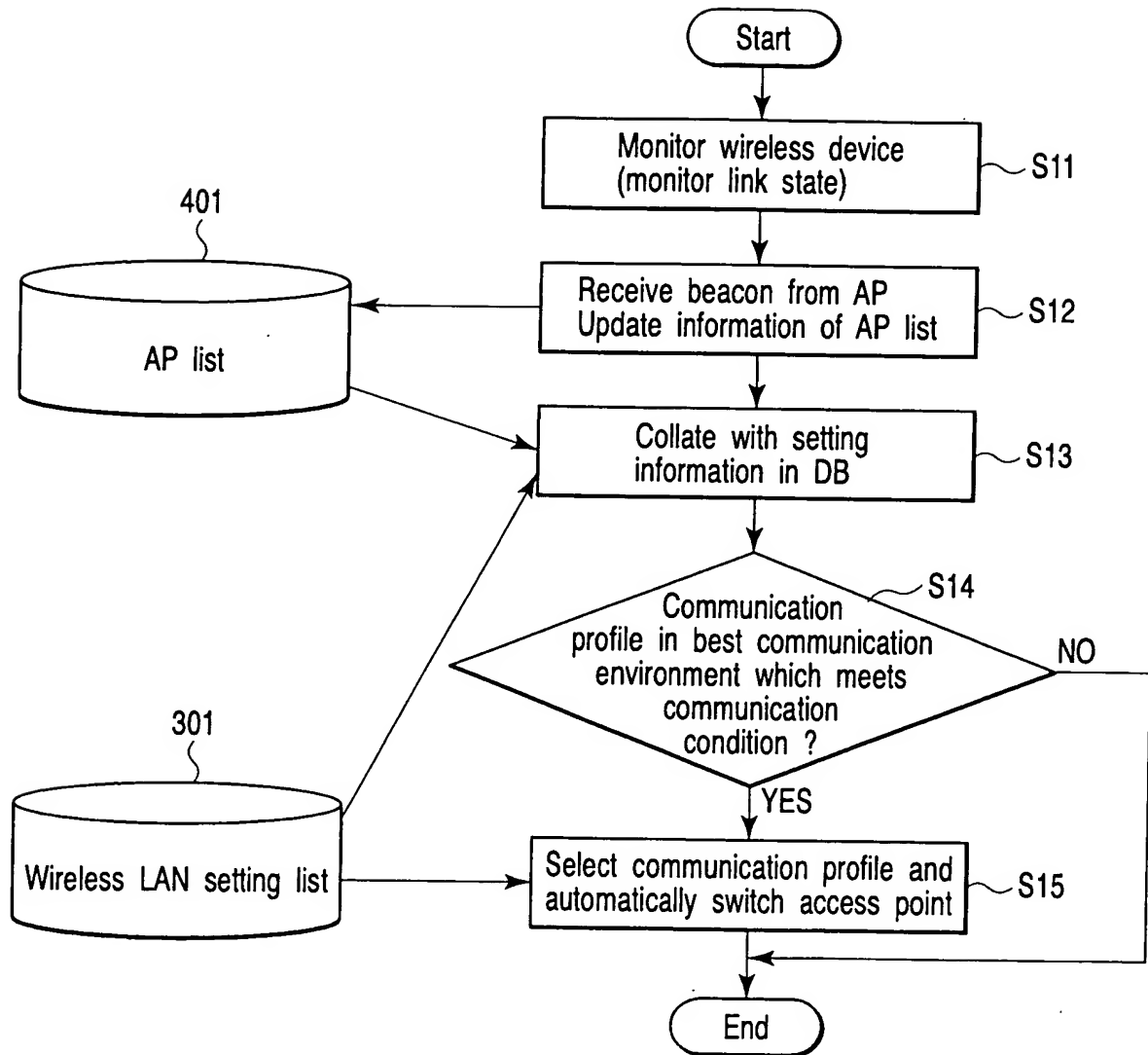


FIG. 6

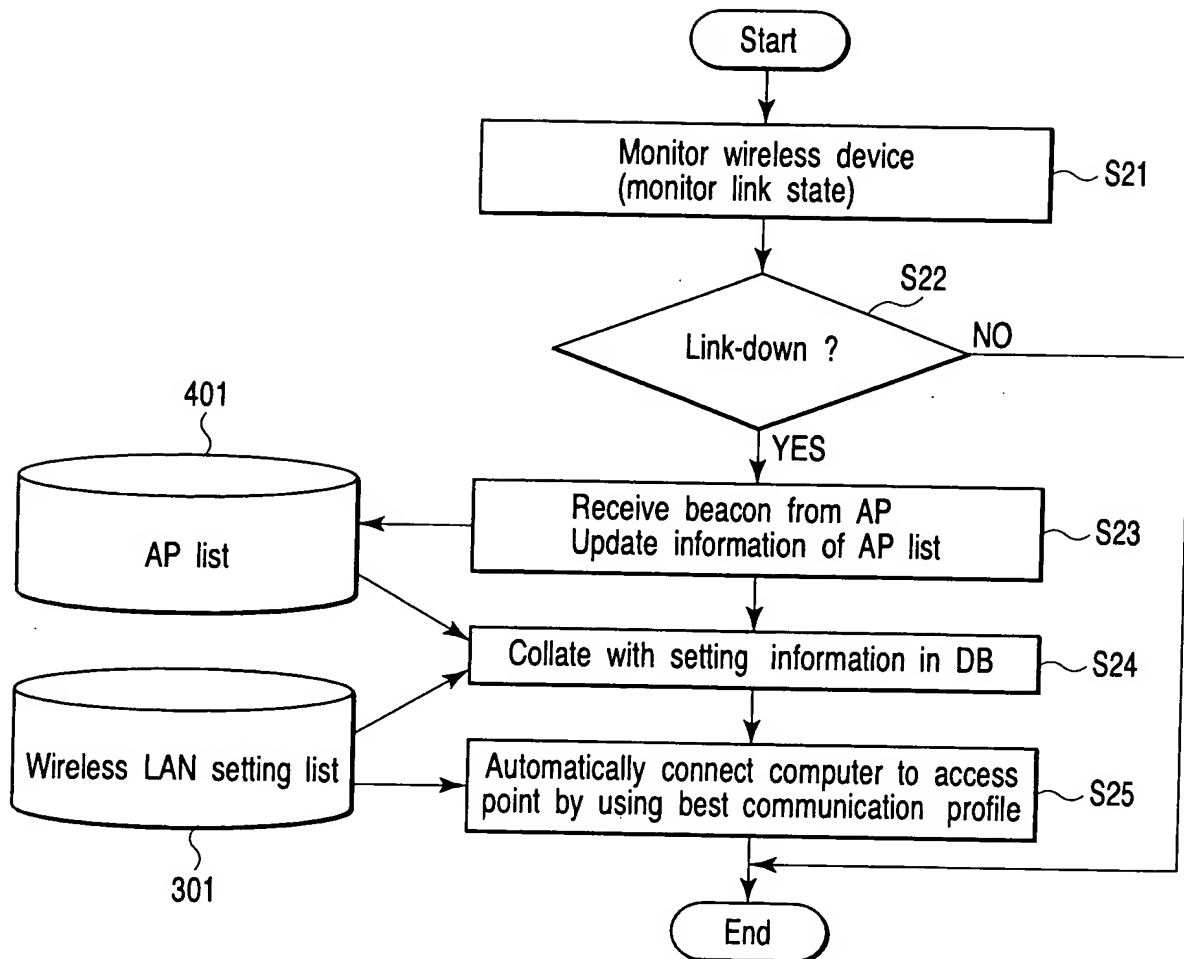


FIG. 7

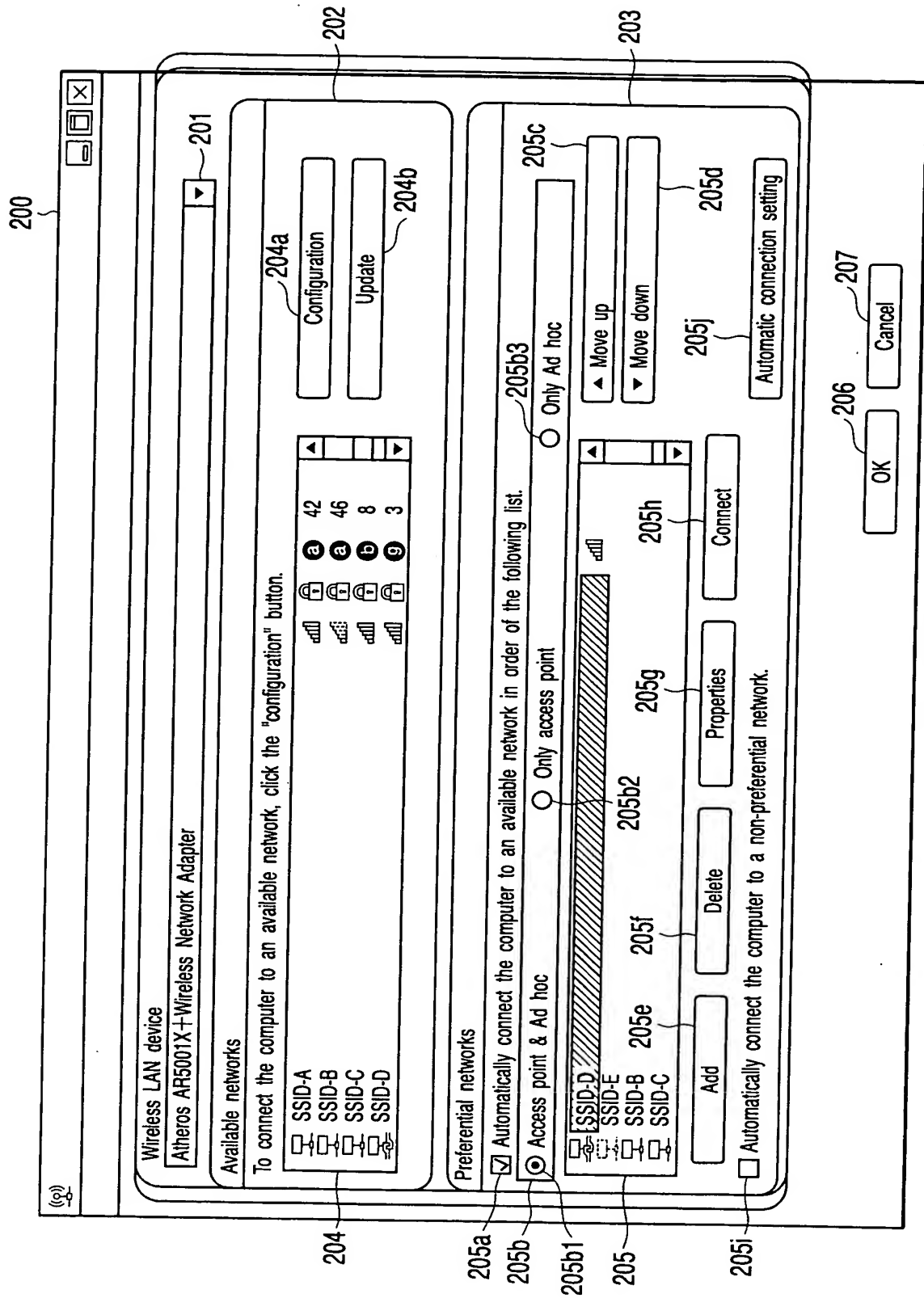


FIG. 8

210

Properties of wireless network

Network name [SSID]: SSID1

Wireless network key

Network authentication : OPEN

Data encryption : WEP

Network key :

Network key confirmation input :

Key index : 1

☐ Automatic key distribution

IEEE 802.1X settings

☐ Validate IEEE 802.1X authentication

EAP type TLS

Configuration of authentication

☐ This is a network between computers [Ad hoc].

Ad hoc channel Auto

OK Cancel

FIG. 9

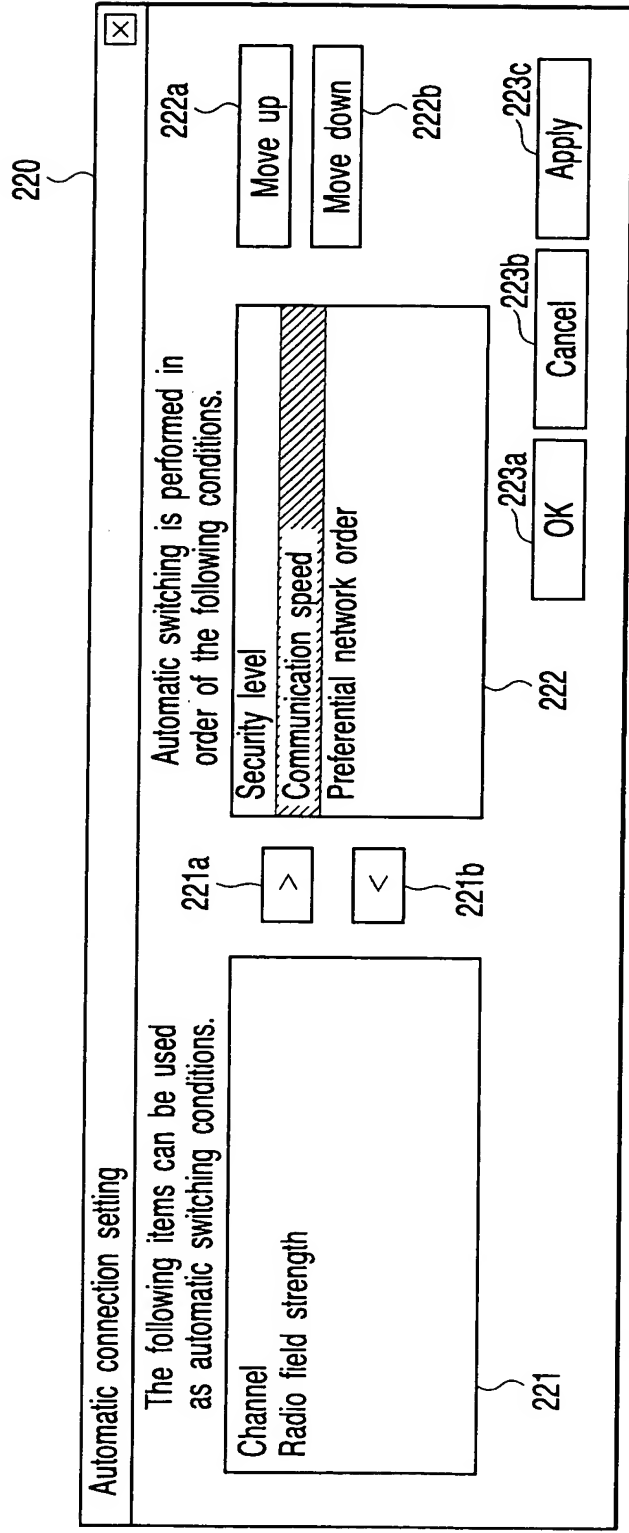


FIG.10